

# How to Design a Happy Old Age

If you want to be happy in your old age you need to surround yourself with the things you love. Things which make you happy when you wake up each day and see them.

If you love cats you must surround yourself with cats. If you love people you must surround yourself with people. If books then surround yourself with books. If trees then trees and so on.

I am happy when I look around me each day and I see books, computer stuff, music instruments, vegan food, painting and art stuff. These are things that I love. And that's only in the flat.

The second bit of it is location. When I open the front door of the building and look across the road I see big old tall trees, squirrels, old stone walls, old buildings. There is a nature conservation area across the road and, just around the corner, is Saint Nicholas Priory which was built by William The Conqueror in 1087.

I'm surrounded by nature and history. I hear the sound of crows and seabirds. I see a rich profusion of flowers in the springtime.

So that takes care of the physical surroundings inside the flat and outside. My spatial location is good.

But what about time?

Time is made of memory and experiences, successes and failures. For this you need to plan ahead.

When I was in my 20s I thought seriously about what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I realised that it is possible to end up with a list of regrets or a list of achievements. But what did I want to achieve?

I decided on a plan. I would make a clear list of the things I considered important and the things I would like to do. Then I would begin to work through the lists and achieve as many as possible. This also includes the reverse aspect: Things I wanted to carefully avoid if possible. I would not have an old age filled with regrets. I would fill that old age with things I really care about.

I cared about the environment, about people, about knowledge and about art. I cared about writing, about stories, about philosophy, religion, self discovery, about animals, children, old people, social structure and freedom of the individual. I wanted to avoid causing harm to other people, to myself, to animals or to the environment.

So I deliberately didn't learn to drive a car. I would not contribute to air pollution if I could possibly avoid it. I stuck to vegetarianism and eventually managed to transition to veganism. I went to drama school for one year and to art school for three years. I worked for the charity

Children's World in Glastonbury, the animal charity Heaven's Gate Animal Sanctuary near Langport and I did unpaid volunteer work for Mendip District Council Social Services and at Street Youth Club. I read the books I wanted to read and studied the subjects I wanted to study. I campaigned against bloodsports, against apartheid, against nuclear weapons. I campaigned in favour of recycling, veganism, environmental protection and sustainable society.

I hit targets I had set for myself. Work with animals, work with children, work with old people and with people who have learning disabilities. Doing the right things. Giving to charities. Going to drama school. Going to art school. Getting the degree. I did all of these things and it makes me happy. It gives me a store of good memories.

There is nothing wrong with taking pleasure in your accomplishments. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that you must be a martyr. You can do good works in the world and take full enjoyment from doing so. There is no reason not to. Don't worry about your motives being selfish. It doesn't matter even if they are. Keep it simple. Don't tie yourself up in psychological knots. Simply work for the things you really care about.

I can look back on a life where I didn't succeed at everything I wanted to but I succeeded at some things which mattered to me and I really cared, really tried, really worked hard to be a positive element in the world.

Someone will read this and dismiss it as "virtue signalling". That's how they try to stop you. Those sort of people will try to stop you from doing anything good because it makes them uncomfortable. They begin to feel as if they also should be making an effort.

People can surprise you. In the early 1980s I was working as a cashier in a petrol station in South Wimbledon and giving to Oxfam any excess money that was left over at the end of each week. I remarked quite a few times to customers that Paul McCartney and other famous rich people should do something to help all of the starving children in famine zones around the world. A lot of other people were saying similar things. Two years later Bob Geldof and Midge Ure organised "Band Aid" and then, in 1985, "Live Aid". They had broken the image of the uncaring rock star who lives in glamour while others starve.

Of course the selfish type of rock star continues to exist. I remember reading a story about Elton John in The Independent which said "Sir Elton John got through almost £40 million over a 20-month period including spending £293,000 on flowers, the High Court heard today."

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/elton-john-spent-pound-40m-in-20-months-622287.html>

If you want to have a happy old age you must decide what it is that you love. What it is that you care about. You must surround yourself with everything which will make you feel a happy sense of exhilaration when you look around you each day. It will be different for each individual person. There is no need to spend huge amounts of money. Elton John and people like him probably have an addiction to spending wealth. I don't think that he really cares that much about the things he buys. That kind of extravagance seems to be an expression of the exact opposite. Of not caring.

I am suggesting that you will have a happier life if you choose the love rather than the selfish uncaring.

What do you love? Dogs? Children? Family? Flowers? Sculpture?

The key to it all is communication. In this instance communicating with yourself, with your own brain and heart and soul. Knowing who you are and what you care about.

Yes. I used to be religious a long time ago. I grew up Christian and then learned about Buddhism and Taoism and a whole lot of other religions and philosophies. Then I realised that god couldn't possibly exist. What sort of god would stand idly by and permit the holocaust or paedophile priests molesting choir boys? Common sense tells us that the god concept is wrong.

Nevertheless you still want to live a nice life and be a nice person, don't you? So it's necessary to translate the desire for that nice life into a workable, down to earth, plan of achievement.

There is no afterlife. There is no heaven or hell. There are no supernatural beings sitting in judgement upon us. We are judges of ourselves. If we wish to have good things and good memories in our older years we have to make that happen through planning and hard work.